

Service Proposes Liberal Waterfowl Hunting Season Frameworks

Surveys show most duck species populations remain strong

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) proposes liberal hunting season lengths and bag limits for the upcoming 2014-15 late waterfowl seasons. States will select their individual seasons from within the federal frameworks that establish the earliest beginning and latest ending dates and the maximum season length and bag limits. According to the Service's 2014 Waterfowl Population Status Report, population estimates for most species of ducks remained strong for this breeding season.

The waterfowl hunting frameworks are set using annual results of cooperative population surveys, banding programs and harvest surveys that produce the largest data set on any wildlife species group in the world. They guide the Service's waterfowl conservation programs and provide hunting opportunities while ensuring the long-term health of waterfowl populations.

In the traditional survey area, which includes Alaska, the north-central United States, and south-central and northern Canada, the 2014 total duck population estimate was 49.2 million birds, an 8 percent increase from last year's estimate of 45.6 million and is 43% higher than the long-term average (1955-2013). Although most duck populations remain strong, where and when waterfowl will be encountered this year depends on many factors. Weather, food availability and water conditions influence local duck abundance, distribution, behavior and, ultimately, hunter success.

Overall, habitat conditions in the survey area were similar to or slightly improved from last year. The 2014 pond estimate for the north-central United States was 2.6 million. Pond numbers in the United States were similar to 2013 and 53 percent above the long-term average (1974-2013).

The proposed federal frameworks include duck hunting season lengths of 60 days in both the Atlantic and Mississippi Flyways, 74 days in the Central Flyway (with an additional 23 days in the High Plains areas), and 107 days in the Pacific Flyway. The proposed late season waterfowl frameworks will appear in the *Federal Register* for public inspection and comment in mid-August.

Each year, the Service works in partnership with states from the four flyways to establish regulatory frameworks for waterfowl hunting season lengths, dates and bag limits. Flyway-specific highlights of the proposed late-season frameworks are as follows:

Atlantic Flyway (Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Vermont, Virginia and West Virginia):

- **Ducks:** A hunting season is proposed of not more than 60 days between Sept. 27, 2014, and Jan. 25, 2015. The proposed daily bag limit is 6 and may include no more than 4 mallards (2 hens), 4 scoters, 3 wood ducks, 2 redheads, 2 scaup, 1 black duck, 2 pintails, 1 canvasbacks, 1 mottled duck, and 1 fulvous whistling duck. The proposed daily bag

limit of mergansers is 5, only 2 of which may be hooded mergansers. In states that include mergansers in the duck bag limit, the daily limit is the same as the duck bag limit, only 2 of which may be hooded mergansers.

- **Geese:** For light geese, states will be able to select a 107-day season between Oct. 1, 2014, and March 10, 2015, with a daily bag limit of 25 birds and no possession limit. Seasons for Canada geese would vary in length among states and areas depending on the populations of birds that occur in those areas. The daily bag limit will be 5 birds in hunt zones established for resident populations of Canada geese. In hunt zones established for migratory populations, bag limits will be 5 or fewer and vary among states and areas. For Atlantic brant, the season length may be 30 days with a daily bag limit of 2.

Mississippi Flyway (Alabama, Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Ohio, Tennessee and Wisconsin):

- **Ducks:** A hunting season is proposed of not more than 60 days between Sept. 27, 2014, and Jan. 25, 2015. The proposed daily bag limit is 6 and may include no more than 4 mallards (2 hens), 3 wood ducks, 1 mottled duck, 2 redheads, 3 scaup, 2 pintails, 1 black duck, and 1 canvasback. The proposed daily bag limit of mergansers is 5, only 2 of which may be hooded mergansers. In states that include mergansers in the duck bag limit, the daily limit is the same as the duck bag limit, only 2 which may be hooded mergansers.
- **Geese:** Generally, seasons for Canada goose would be held between Sept. 27, 2014, and Jan. 31, 2015, and vary in length among states and areas. States would be able to select seasons for light geese not to exceed 107 days with 20 geese daily between Sept. 27, 2014, and March 10, 2015; for white-fronted goose the proposed season would not exceed 74 days with a 2-bird daily bag limit or 88 days with a 1-bird daily bag limit between Sept. 27, 2014, and Feb. 15, 2015; and for brant it would not exceed 70 days with a 1-bird daily bag limit or 107 days with a 1 bird daily bag limit between Sept. 27, 2014, and Jan. 31, 2015.

Central Flyway (Kansas, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, and portions of Colorado, Montana, New Mexico and Wyoming):

- **Ducks:** Duck season frameworks are between Sept. 27, 2014 and Jan. 25, 2015. The daily bag limit is 6 ducks, with species and sex restrictions as follows: 5 mallards, no more than 2 of which may be females; 3 wood ducks, 3 scaup, 2 pintails, 2 redheads, 1 canvasback, and 1 mottled duck. Mottled ducks may not be harvested during the first 5 days of the regular season in Texas. In the High Plains Mallard Management Unit (roughly west of the 100th Meridian), a 97-day season is proposed, and the last 23 days can start no earlier than Dec. 13, 2014. A 74-day season is proposed for the remainder of the Central Flyway.
- **Geese:** States may select seasons between Sept. 27, 2014 and Feb. 15, 2015, for dark geese and between Sept. 27, 2014, and March 10, 2015, for light geese. East-tier states are able to select a 107-day season for Canada geese with a daily bag limit of 8. For white-fronted geese, east-tier states will be able to select either a 74-day season with a daily bag limit of 2 birds or an 88 day season with a daily bag limit of 1 bird. In the west-

tier, states may select a 107-day dark goose season with a daily bag limit of 5 birds. In the Western Goose Zone of Texas, the state could select a 95-day season with a daily bag limit of 5 dark geese (including no more than 1 white-fronted goose). For light geese, all states would be able to select a 107-day season with a daily bag limit of 50.

Pacific Flyway (Arizona, California, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington and portions of Colorado, Montana, New Mexico and Wyoming):

- **Ducks:** States are allowed a 107-day general duck season between Sept. 27, 2014, and Jan. 25, 2015. The proposed daily bag limit is 7 ducks and mergansers, including no more than 2 female mallards, 2 redheads, 2 pintails, 1 canvasback and 3 scaup. For scaup, the season length can be 86 days, which may be split according to applicable zones/split duck hunting configurations approved for each state.
- **Geese:** States may select a 107-day season between Sept. 27, 2014 and Jan. 25, 2015 for Canada geese, and between Sept. 27, 2014, and Mar. 10, 2015 for light geese and white-fronted geese. Proposed basic daily bag limits are 20 light geese, 10 white-fronted geese, and 4 Canada geese. There are many exceptions to the basic bag limits and season structures for geese in many states, so consult state regulations for specific details. For brant, the proposed season lengths are 16 days in Oregon and Washington and 30 days in California, with a 2-bird daily limit. Washington and California are able to choose seasons in each of the two zones described in state regulations.

The *Status of Waterfowl* report can be found at <http://www.fws.gov/migratorybirds/>. To view a video of the *Status of Waterfowl* video visit: <http://flyways.us/status-of-waterfowl/video-report/>.

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